

The Painter, the Actor, the Piano Player

by Nonnie Augustine

1.

As fast as that I wake to astonishing desire. I'd met you at my parents' house just the weekend before but for them (them the drained students trying to relax, refill before their afternoon sessions) you are the stranger in the room, (the room the shabby basement cafeteria in the old Juilliard building on Claremont Avenue.) All these years later I can summon the flip of my belly as you stride to my table of dancers (the room holds its breath) enfold me, kiss me (the room sighs) and I refill here and now with that first taste of delicious knowing.

2.

A phone call about a blind date with an actor who will meet me on the steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art primes me for the man who has picked such a place for us to meet. I get there early, filled with notions. From the top of the steps I spot you climb from a cab. You bound up the proud staircase straight toward me. How did you know me? A failed audition for Antonioni's "Zabriskie Point;" you are too old at twenty-five, but still you buzz because Antonioni knows you now and maybe... We walk south on 5th Avenue and somewhere around the 72nd St. entrance to Central Park the next two and a half years have begun.

3.

You knock the first night thirty-five minutes late, so this is the first time I forgive you. I'd raced downtown to my two rooms on 14th Street from Lincoln Center, panicked that I'd have no time to shower away the sweat from ten hours in dance studios, desperate to shampoo my oily itchy head. Cleaned up in time because you are late, I undo the police lock. Your tweed jacket white shirt, curly wild

red/brown hair, round blue smart eyes, and tall skinny grace punch me in the heart so that my chest contracts. Did I gasp?

4.

A sudden, heavy rain lowered a bough of the too tall old rose bush. One pink bloom is done for but the other holds its fat shape. The greens outside my window quiver. My wild Florida garden drank its fill; the sky is bright gray. The thousands of leaves outside my bedroom window applaud. I applaud. You three young men are with me this early morning and you are painted by Matisse. Three times in four years I stepped off the cliff to ride the currents. While aloft I danced, bounced, sailed, dove in winds, rains, blazing heat and cold like I've not known since. When I was just eighteen, almost nineteen, and twenty-one, I flew over and through New York City with you and you and you. Whoosh! Who pushed, who pulled? No matter. My hand, your hands gripped tightly for a time, until one of us loosened, one of us let go. Ah, the summer sun is back, but the garden has had a powerful drink, is refreshed and will not droop for hours.

